

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TOKYO 16301 01 OF 02 140440Z

13

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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R 140404Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6735

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT JA

SUBJ: DOMESTIC REACTION TO FORMATION OF MIKI GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY: PRESS REACTION TO MIKI GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE, AND PAPERS HAVE RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT BOTH WILL AND ABILITY OF NEW PRIME MINISTER TO COPE WITH NATION'S ECONOMIC ILLS AND TO BRING ABOUT POLITICAL REFORM. BUSINESS COMMUNITY ALSO HAS MISGIVINGS ABOUT MIKI, BUT IS GIVING HIM PUBLIC SUPPORT IN HOPE THAT HE CAN IMPROVE LDP'S TARNISHED IMAGE. MEANWHILE, OPPOSITION PARTIES, UNABLE TO CRITICIZE EITHER MIKI'S CHARACTER OR POLICY POSITIONS, HAVE TEMPORARILY DECIDED ON POLICY OF DIALOGUE RATHER THAN CONFRONTATION. GENERAL REACHION IS THAT MIKI GOVERNMENT IS UNLIKELY TO GENERATE MUCH CHANGE EITHER IN DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 TOKYO 16301 01 OF 02 140440Z

1. PRESS REACTION TO NEW MIKI GOVERNMENT HAS SO FAR

TENDED TO HAVE SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE CAST. EDITORIALS HAVE CHARACTERIZED CABINET AS ONE LACKING FRESH COLOR AND REGRETTABLY PUT TOGETHER ON BASIS OF USUAL FACTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS. SOME ALSO INDICATE THAT IN PROCESS OF FORMING CABINET, MIKI'S INABILITY IN SOME INSTANCES TO ASSIGN POSTS TO MEN HE DESIRED REVEALED WEAKNESS OF HIS POSITION AS MINOR FACTION LEADER.

2. PRESS COMMENT DULY NOTES MIKI'S REPUTATION FOR BEING UNTOUCHED BY CORRUPTION AND HIS LONG-STANDING ADVOCACY OF PARTY REFORM. FOR THESE REASONS HE IS VIEWED AS LDP LEADER WITH GREATEST POTENTIAL FOR DISPELLING NEGATIVE PUBLIC IMAGE OF LDP WHICH HAS DEVELOPED OVER YEARS AND BEEN INTENSIFIED BY ACTIONS AND OPERATING STYLE OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER TANAKA. PRESS SAYS THAT JAPANESE PEOPLE HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR NEW PRIME MINISTER (HE HAS FARED WELL IN POLLS), BUT THAT UNLESS HE DISPLAYS POSITIVE, ENERGETIC LEADERSHIP AND ABILITY TO MOVE FROM WORDS TO ACTION, HE WILL QUICKLY LOSE PUBLIC SUPPORT. SHOULD THIS HAPPEN, LDP WILL FIND ITSELF IN SERIOUSLY DETERIORATING POSITION.

3. IN ADDITION TO DISCUSSING MECHANICS OF CABINET-MAKING AND PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS, NEWSPAPERS HAVE SET FORTH TASKS WITH WHICH THEY THINK MIKI GOVERNMENT MUST CONCERN ITSELF. WHILE SPECIFICS VARY FROM PAPER TO PAPER, NOT SURPRISINGLY MOST COMMON PROBLEMS CITED ARE THOSE OF COPING WITH BURGEONING INFLATION (AND ECONOMIC ISSUES GENERALLY) AND FOR BRINGING ABOUT PARTY REFORM WHICH WILL RESTORE PEOPLE'S TRUST IN POLITICAL PROCESS. MOST COMMENTATORS, HOWEVER, ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC. IN ADDITION TO CITING INHERENT DIFFICULTIES FACING ANY LEADER ATTEMPTING TO HANDLE SUCH PROBLEMS, PRESS HAS CRITICIZED MIKI FOR FAILURE TO DISPLAY EITHER NECESSARY RESOLUTION OR CONCRETE POLICIES. HIS NEWS CONFERENCES AND OTHER PUBLIC STATEMENTS SINCE ASSUMING OFFICE HAVE BEEN DESCRIBED AS "DISAPPOINTING," PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF HIS FAILURE TO MAKE TRANSITION FROM RECITATION OF VAGUE GENERALITIES TO EXPLANATION OF SPECIFIC PLANS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TOKYO 16301 01 OF 02 140440Z

4. BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL LEADERS, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, HOLD MIKI IN LOW REGARD, LESS BECAUSE OF HIS LACK OF ECONOMIC EXPERTISE THAN BECAUSE OF HIS RECORD AS "PROGRESSIVE" AND POLITICAL MAVERICK. SOME ARE EVEN REPORTEDLY WORRIED THAT HE MAY DAMAGE SECURITY OR ECONOMIC TIES WITH U.S. THROUGH SOME ILL-FOUNDED ACTION TO ACHIEVE SOME IMMEDIATE GOAL LIKE ARAB OIL. DESPITE SUCH

MISGIVINGS, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE RESPONDED TO MIKI'S ASSUMPTION OF POWER WITH PUBLIC PLEDGES OF SUPPORT. TWO NHK REPORTERS TOLD EMBOFF THAT BUSINESS BACKING FOR MIKI (ATE LEAST ON SURFACE) DERIVES FROM REAL CONCERN THAT LDP FACES SERIOUS CRISIS AND PERCEPTION THAT IMAGE OF REFORM REPRESENTED BY MIKI IS ESSENTIAL TO PRESERVATION OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL POWER. FOR SAME REASON THEY FEEL MORE RESPONSIVENESS TO PUBLIC DEMANDS IS NECESSARY AND WILL GO ALONG WITH LIKELY MIKI PROGRAMS SUCH AS INCREASED SPENDING FOR SOCIAL WELFARE AND ADDITIONAL GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER BUSINESS THROUGH MORE RESTRICTIVE ANTI-MONOPOLY LAWS.

5. OPPOSITION PARTIES FIND THEMSELVES SOMEWHAT PERPLEXED AS TO BEST WAY TO DEAL WITH MIKI GOVERNMENT. BECAUSE HE IS "CLEAN" AND ENJOYS AT LEAST A POPULAR WILLINGNESS TO GIVE HIM A CHANCE, THEY HAVE RULED OUT PERSONAL ATTACKS OF TYPE DIRECTED AGAINST TANAKA. MOREOVER, BECAUSE HIS GENERAL POLICY ORIENTATION, WITH EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL WELFARE AND POLITICAL REFORM, APPROACHES THEIR OWN, THEIR FREEDOM FOR MANEUVER IS RESTRICTED. CONSEQUENTLY, THEIR FIRST REACTION HAS BEEN TO MOVE OSTENSIBLY FROM POLICY OF CONFRONTATION TO ONE OF DIALOGUE. FOR EXAMPLE, JSP, JCP AND DSP LEADERS HAVE ALL INDICATED DESIRE TO MEET MIKI FOR DISCUSSION OF NEXT YEAR'S BUDGET. THEIR TACK, FOR TIME BEING AT LEAST, WILL BE TO PUSH MIKI FOR REALIZATION OF HIS AVOWED GOALS OF POLITICAL RENOVATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE REFORM. AT SAME TIME, OF COURSE, THEY WILL CONTINUE TO PROBE FOR WEAK SPOTS AND WILL SEEK TO FERRET OUT EVIDENCE OF CORRUPTION ON PART OF NEW CABINET MEMBERS SUCH AS ITI MINISTER KOMOTO AND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY DIRECTOR GENERAL OZAWA. WE ALSO KNOW FROM PUBLIC STATEMENTS AS WELL AS OUR CONTACTS WITH OPPOSITION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 TOKYO 16301 01 OF 02 140440Z

MEMBERS THAT THEY WILL CONTINUE TO PUSH HARD ON NUCLEAR ISSUE.

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PAGE 01 TOKYO 16301 02 OF 02 140534Z

11

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 TOKYO 16301

6. IN EFFORT TO GAIN FURTHER SENSE OF JAPANESE REACTION TO MIKI GOVERNMENT, IN ADDITION TO MONITORING PRESS, EMBOFFS HAVE TALKED TO DIETMEN, PARTY STAFF MEMBERS, NEWSMEN AND OTHER OBSERVERS OF JAPANESE POLITICAL SCENE. ALMOST INVARIABLY PREFACING COMMENTS WITH STATEMENT THAT "IT IS TOO EARLY TO SAY," RESPONDENTS HAVE OFFERED VARIETY OF ASSESSMENTS, OFTEN CONFLICTING, AND THERE IS NO REAL CONSENSUS. HOWEVER, SOME OBSERVATIONS AND VIEWS HAVE BEEN REPEATED FREQUENTLY ENOUGH TO INDICATE AT LEAST THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM:

(A) MIKI WAS NAMED PRIME MINISTER TO AVOID SPLIT IN LDP AND TO GIVE IMPRESSION PARTY MOVING TOWARD REFORM. HE IS LARGELY FIGUREHEAD, LACKING SIGNIFICANT POWER BASE OF HIS OWN WITHIN LDP. FUKUDA AND SHIINA ARE IN STRONG POSITIONS, WITH OHIRA RELEGATED TO LESSER ROLE AND NAKASONE IN EVEN WEAKER ONE.

(B) PROSPECTS FOR REAL PARTY REFORM ARE MINIMAL, BUT SOME EFFORT IN THAT DIRECTION, AT LEAST FOR COSMETIC PURPOSES, IS LIKELY.

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PAGE 02 TOKYO 16301 02 OF 02 140534Z

(C) BECAUSE OF THE SURPRISING CHECK-MATE OF CONTENDING LDP RIVALRIES, MIKI GOVERNMENT COULD LAST AT LEAST YEAR AND AS MUCH AS THREE, ESPECIALLY IF ECONOMIC SITUATION ATTAINS ANY APPEARANCE OF STABILIZING IN NEXT FEW MONTHS.

7. IN SUM, EARLY JAPANESE REACTION TO ADVENT OF MIKI
GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO BE THAT WHILE IT PROVIDES LDP
ADDITIONAL TIME IN WHICH TO ATTEMPT RESTORATION OF
SAGGING FORTUNES, IT IS UNLIKELY TO BRING ABOUT
SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE IN POLITICAL PROCESS. REACTION ALSO
IS THAT WHILE AT LEAST MARGINALLY INCREASED SOCIAL
WELFARE MEASURES ARE LIKELY, ABILITY OF NEW GOVERNMENT
TO COPE WITH ECONOMIC ISSUES REMAINS MOST IMPORTANT
QUESTION MARK.
SHOESMITH

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